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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001303

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2008

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [PKK](#)

SUBJECT: OCALAN'S CONTINUED ISOLATION, POSSIBLE RETURN OF
OHAL COULD SPARK TROUBLE IN SOUTHEAST

REF: A. ANKARA 972

[1](#)B. ADANA 44

Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.5 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Relatives and attorneys remain unable to visit jailed PKK leader Ocalan; the last visit took place November 27. The official GOT line is that stormy weather has grounded the boat that takes visitors to Ocalan's island prison, but some GOT officials privately acknowledge there must be other factors at play. Human rights and Kurdish activists have protested the situation, and there has been a series of demonstrations over Ocalan's situation, sometimes involving violence. GOT officials say the Government is preoccupied with Iraq and Cyprus and is unlikely to address the problem at this time. Meanwhile, there are concerns that a return to a state of emergency in the southeast in the event of war in Iraq will further stir tensions in the region. End Summary.

Ocalan's Isolation Continues

[1](#)2. (C) Jandarma officials continue to prevent lawyers and relatives from visiting jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan; the last such visit took place November 27 (reftels). The GOT maintains that stormy weather has grounded the boat used to shuttle visitors every Wednesday to Imrali Island in the Sea of Marmara, where Ocalan is the only prisoner. The GOT arranged for representatives of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to visit Ocalan by helicopter February 17. The CPT officials reported Ocalan to be in good health, but told reporters they did not believe weather was the sole reason for his isolation. Demonstrations, sometimes violent, protesting Ocalan's isolation continue across the southeast (reftel B), as well as in Istanbul, Ankara and other cities.

HRA Investigates

[1](#)3. (C) Husnu Ondul, president of the Human Rights Association (HRA), told Poloff February 26 that HRA investigated Ocalan's situation at the request of relatives and attorneys. Ondul said he and other HRA officials met for one hour with the Chief Public Prosecutor of Bursa, who has authority over the Imrali prison. The Jandarma commander in Gemlik, who controls transportation to the island, refused to meet them. Ondul noted the close ties between the Jandarma and the Turkish General Staff (TGS), and argued that the military is blocking access to Ocalan in a deliberate effort to stir tension in the Kurdish community. It is true that the Marmara is often subject to high winds during the winter months, but the Jandarma could easily guarantee access to Ocalan by providing a larger boat. While the small boat used by Ocalan's visitors has been grounded the past three months, thousands of Jandarma and prison officials have traveled to the island in larger boats. Ondul said the visitors' boat is unsafe for the five-hour trip to Imrali. The Gemlik Jandarma commander February 26 allowed visitors to set sail for Imrali for the first time in three months, but the boat was forced to turn back, supposedly because of high waves. Two of Ocalan's attorneys told Poloff the boat could have made the trip.

Official GOT Line Appears Dubious

[1](#)4. (C) Kaan Esener, head of the MFA's Department of Council of Europe Affairs, insisted in a meeting with Poloff that

weather was the sole reason for Ocalan's isolation. He acknowledged Poloff's concerns about the demonstrations sparked by the situation, and said he spent five days arranging the CPT visit in an attempt to lower tensions. He said he believed attorneys and relatives might be able to finally visit Ocalan March 5, though he declined to elaborate. However, Inan Ozyildiz, foreign affairs advisor to the President, told Poloff separately the weather explanation was "silly." He speculated that the military might be concerned about Ocalan passing messages to PKK terrorists (Note: According to a press report, one of Ocalan's Imrali-bound lawyers was caught February 26 carrying PKK-related documents hidden inside a newspaper. Ocalan attorneys deny it. End Note). A Danish diplomat told Poloff that, according to an AK Party contact, AK Chairman Erdogan first learned of the Ocalan situation in mid-February and angrily demanded it be resolved. If so, his demand has been studiously ignored.

State of Emergency Could Return to Southeast

15. (C) Ondul said he is also concerned about press reports that the TGS has sent a letter to the Prime Ministry recommending that a state of emergency be declared in six southeastern provinces in the event of war in Iraq. He said the southeast had been under some form of martial law for 24 years, and was finally freed when the state of emergency was phased out November 30. A return to curfews, roadblocks and intrusive searches could snuff out the people's newfound hope and bring back the tensions of the mid-90s. Although a new state of emergency would be tied to a war in Iraq, it could easily be extended. The previous state of emergency was introduced as a temporary measure, but was renewed for years at four-month intervals.

16. (C) Ozyildiz and Esener -- as well as Interior Ministry Secretary General Nazih Dogan -- asserted they are not aware

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of a proposal for a war-related state of emergency, while acknowledging such a move would not surprise them. Despite concerns about tensions in the southeast, Ozyildiz and Esener claimed the Ocalan situation and the possibility of a state of emergency are not among the GOT's main concerns at this time. Esener does not believe the Ocalan situation can be resolved while so many other high-profile issues are on the agenda. "The government is worried about Iraq and Cyprus. The last thing they want to hear about is Ocalan," he averred.

Comment

17. (C) There is clearly more than weather behind the policy of isolating Ocalan. Speculation has centered on two theories: 1) the military wants to prevent the PKK leader from delivering messages; and 2) the military wants to provoke conflict in order to justify a crackdown. Both of these arguments appear to carry weight with elements of the TGS and Jandarma. The people of Turkey's southeast do not trust the government and will fear that any reimposition of a state of emergency will mean a crackdown against them. For this reason, it is especially important for the GOT to allow Ocalan's visits to resume and lower tensions. Embassy will continue to raise this issue with contacts.

PEARSON